

Executive Update



A special update for Idaho conservation leaders ♦ Winter 2005

Special Feature

319 Helps Farmers Try Practices

These days, many southern Idaho farmers are just making it by the “skin on their onions.” That’s why an EPA 319 grant for two Japanese American farmers near Weiser is providing resources for new conservation practices.

Tracy Nakamura and Dyke Nagasaka grow onions, sugarbeets, beans and other crops on their individual family farms. Through a 319 grant, they are trying practices like surge and drip irrigation, soil moisture sensors, sediment ponds, filter strips and PAM.

“We’re glad to be a part of this demonstration project,” Nakamura says. “It’s helping to upgrade some



Tracy Nakamura preparing onions for harvest.

of our systems which, with capital expenses of \$30,000 or more, is really hard for farmers to do.”

Nakamura farms 800 acres with two brothers. His father started the farm in 1951 after both his parents spent time in a relocation camp during World War II.

“I continually try to do the best I can for the farm,” Nakamura says.

“We’re going to learn a great deal from this project to help us manage it better.”

The conversion to surge irrigation has reduced their water use by half and cut back on fertilizer output. And the filter strips are reducing soil loss from his fields, Nakamura says.

Dyke Nagasaka farms 500 acres where his grandfather once raised hogs. After returning from the relocation camps, his father switched to row crops. Now Nagasaka is trying drip irrigation on parts of the farm.

“These are the best onions I’ve had on this ground,” he says. “The drip irrigation spoon-feeds the crop.”

Nagasaka has reduced water usage and cut fertilizer outputs by one-third or more on his 319 fields. He’s also using PAM, straw mulching and sediment basins.

“Everything we do can create problems and it’s up to us to try and minimize them,” he says. “Unfortunately, it costs money to be environmentally conscious. The 319 grants help a lot.”



Dyke Nagasaka and his father look at an onion grown on his 319 field.

Another Drought Year?

Winter’s half-way point has passed and snowpacks still remain well below average, according to the recent Idaho Water Supply Report.

The NRCS Snow Survey staff collects data from about 140 sites around the state to determine snowpack levels and streamflow forecasts for the report.

“Right now, we have a large water deficit to overcome,” says **Ron Abramavich**, NRCS water supply specialist. “We need a great deal of precipitation to replenish depleted snowpacks statewide.”

Below average January precipitation was recorded everywhere in the state except for the Bear River Basin which received 112 percent of average. The Weiser, Payette and Boise basins January precipitation was 42 percent while most of the state received 60-70 percent.

Most snowpacks are much lower than this time last year. The Wood and Lost, Upper Snake and Southside Snake River basins fall into the 75-85 percent range while the Salmon, Owyhee, Weiser, Boise and Payette River basins are at 60-70 percent of average. The largest deficit lies in the Panhandle region and Clearwater basins where snowpacks are only at 50 percent.

Streamflow forecasts now range from 55-75 percent of average for the April-September period across most of the state.



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Conservationist's Corner



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Management Efficiencies in Federal Government? You Bet.

In a time of “doing more with less,” everyone is looking for that silver bullet: management efficiencies.

We hear of the private sector sponsoring time-study projects, calculating cost-benefit ratios or researching ways to reach new customers.

Despite the jokes about red tape, many of us in Government work hard to find efficiencies as well. Case in point: NRCS Chief Bruce Knight has developed seven categories for evaluating how states manage their Farm Bill conservation programs.

I am proud to announce that Idaho NRCS recently ranked third in the nation for the most efficient management of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). This means that we, along with our Local Working Groups and conservation partners on the ground, provided quality customer service to the producers applying EQIP practices. We also addressed local priority resource concerns, and ranked and awarded money in a timely fashion.

What does this ultimately mean to Idaho farmers, ranchers and the conservation partnership? It means an additional \$1.4 million in EQIP funding to implement conservation plans and practices on private lands.

It's nice to be rewarded for our efficiencies. And, with the looming USDA budget cuts, I guarantee you, we will continue searching for ways to “do more with less.”

Idaho OnePlan Wins Governor's Award

Governor Dirk Kempthorne recently awarded the “forward thinkers” of Idaho OnePlan the Governor's Award for Excellence in Agriculture.

Kempthorne recognized OnePlan software as an innovative way to assist dairies in meeting the government-issued mandate of completing certified management plans.

OnePlan helps producers plan conservation practices, review federal and state regulations and search out conservation funding options. The program is free and available online.

Organizations involved in Idaho OnePlan's creation include the Idaho Association of Conservation Districts, Idaho Soil Conservation Commission, Idaho State University and NRCS.

-Barbara Albiston

Idaho RC&D Wins Regional Awards

The Western Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Association recently recognized three Idahoans for exemplary work. The Association includes the 11 western states.

RC&Ds help local communities improve their natural resources, improve facilities and services, and expand industries and create jobs.

Paul Calverley, Southwest Idaho RC&D Council member in Meridian and former NRCS Idaho State Conservationist, received an award for his commitment to the local, state, regional and national RC&D organizations.

Arin Nesbitt and **Russ Manwaring**, both from the West Central Highlands RC&D in Emmett, received the Outstanding Program Assistant and Outstanding RC&D Coordinator awards respectively.

“Through their efforts our six counties have addressed fire mitigation planning and all hazard mitigation

Farewell to a True Conservationist

The Idaho conservation community lost one of its heroes when **Morley Nelson** died Feb. 21 at the age of 88.

Nelson served as the Idaho NRCS (then Soil Conservation Service) Snow Survey supervisor from 1948 to 1974. He located and installed many of the snow measuring sites still in use today.

However, he is most known for his birds of prey conservation efforts. A raptor expert, Nelson played an instrumental role in the creation of the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area and the World Center for Birds of Prey. He also raised public awareness through dozens of movies and TV specials starring his eagle or hawks.

planning,” says **Ken Roberts**, chairman of the RC&D. “We have worked on fish screens for endangered bull trout to preservation of historic buildings. Russ and Arin are at the heart of every project our RC&D sponsors.”

Paul Calverley with **Keith Kessler**, president, Western RC&D Assoc.



Arin Nesbitt, **Russ Manwaring**.



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